

*(The following column by Ian Menzies was reprinted with permission from the Patriot Ledger:)*

## Duxbury to Chatham: A Tale of Two Jewels

As Tom Groux tells it, when he first applied for the job of town manager of Duxbury, he thought the Pilgrim settlement established by Myles Standish, Elder Brewster and John Alden was actually on Cape Cod.

"But," he adds with a smile, "on first going for an interview, my wife and I found out we didn't have to cross the Sagamore Bridge after all."

That was in 1988.

Groux, now 62, who spent 6 years as Duxbury's first town manager, is today a great more knowledgeable about Cape Cod, the South Shore and all things coastal.

As is the habit of those in the town management business, he moved on, this time to Chatham, for selective rather than career reasons. And, perhaps he can be excused for geographically misplacing Duxbury because he came from inland Winchester, where he served for 10 years as the first town manager, then spent 4 years as dean of finance and administration at Middlesex Community College in Bedford.

Earlier, he learned his vocation as an assistant in Groton, CT, Hastings and Yonkers, NY, and Howell, NJ.

Not only was I curious about the peripatetic life of those in town management, but I wondered how Groux dealt with 2 coastal towns seemingly similar but actually very different – Duxbury, an upscale, bucolic commuter bedroom community with a "townie" base; and Chatham, a mix of well-to-do residential retirees and not-so-well-off, hard-working fishermen with a huge summer tourist overlay.

Asked to compare the 2 towns, Groux rather neatly did so by invoking the observations of a friend familiar with both communities.

"When I took the job in Duxbury," says Groux, "my friend told me I had discovered one of the gems of the South Shore.

"When I told him I was going to Chatham he said, 'You're going from a gem to a jewel.'"

Groux's only regret about Duxbury: "I'm sorry I discovered it after my kids had grown. It's a beautiful town to raise a family in, a great community, with a tremendous amount of citizen involvement including young executives who work in Boston and whose companies encourage public service."

During his 6 Duxbury years, Groux updated management, introduced a program budget and capital improvement program, and combined all waterfront operations into a single department. But, he says, Duxbury is a town that wants to stay the way it is: residential.

So why did he leave? Happenstance.

He and his wife felt that someday they might like to retire to the Cape. They started looking for a house in the Sandwich-Barnstable area from which he could commute to Duxbury and where they could remain when he retired.

It was at just that time—1995—that Chatham started talking about changing its form of government, its executive secretary left, and Groux saw a chance to realize his future plans in a single move.

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Here it might be helpful to note the differences between a town manager, a town administrator and a town executive secretary, although, as Groux points out, there isn't a clear, clean definition for each.

A town manager position is established through a charter or special act of the Legislature. It gives a manager independent authority for the budget, the hiring and firing of employees, and contracts.

Town administrators are sometimes delegated similar authority by selectmen, but such actions can be questioned, so for several reasons the cleanest management approach is the establishment of a manager.

What has Groux found to be the management challenge in all 3 Massachusetts towns he has served? "Consolidation." Eliminating a surfeit of elected boards, more professional government.

And in Chatham his current thrust, as even casual tourists would guess, is to consolidate coastal resources to deal with beach erosion, homes toppling into the ocean, barrier-beach breakthroughs, the need for dredging to keep the fishing fleet operating, and the latest problem, threatened damage to shellfish beds because of arguably too many boats with too many large concrete mooring blocks covering the seabed.

Trouble is, someone loses a concrete block, perhaps the marker buoy gets cut or the block gets separated through old age or it can't be raised, and it's simply replaced with another. Some are as large as 16 square feet.

So crowded is the mooring situation that selectmen recently suggested a moratorium on new mooring permits, but held off. At last count, 2,210 mooring permits had been issued for this summer.

Groux is currently looking for a director of coastal resources, which would include the position of harbor-master, thus enabling the town to make a more coordinated approach to problems affecting boats, beaches and fishing.

And there are enough coastal problems in Chatham that the new director better be ready to hit the beach running.

Chatham is interesting: the Cape's premier retirement town if gauged by the average age of its residents, and arguably the Cape's most admired community.

It differs from Duxbury in that it does have a multimillion-dollar industry – fishing (fin fishing, lobstering and shellfishing) as well as a relatively large tourist industry.

In summer, Chatham's year-round population of 6,200 rises to an estimated 20,000 says Groux, adding that despite the inevitable downtown traffic jams, residents are surprisingly tolerant of visitors who crowd its attractive downtown shopping area.

Looking back, how does Groux feel about a career as a town manager?

"I can't think of a more interesting one," he says. "Like the military, you have a chance at a young age to be given a lot of responsibility which can give great satisfaction.

"There isn't the financial attraction, but I'm happy I chose it. I would encourage young people to consider it."